



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **Region Three Citizen's Advisory Committee Fish, Wildlife & Parks R3 Headquarters – Bozeman March 7, 2013**

**CAC Attendees:** Rick Arnold, Mike Dailey, Dan Crismore, Barb Cestero, Katie Weaver, David Gibson, Tom Helm, Cyndy Andrus, LeRoy Mehring

**CAC Absent:** Rick Grady, Ken Sinay, Cale Christiansen, Joe Cohenour

**FWP Staff Present:** Pat Flowers, Travis Horton, Jerry Walker, Howard Burt, Mike Vaughn, Sam Sheppard

**Guests:** Dan Vermillion

**Public:** Laura Lundquist-Bozeman Chronicle, Glenn Hockett, Zack Strong

### **Greetings, Introductions, Roundtable – Pat Flowers**

We have two vacant positions on the R3 CAC, waiting to fill until fall. Recognition for a few termed out folks will be in June.

Agenda changes: Director's Office not able to be here, will be here in June.

Arnold: Trout Unlimited (TU) information shared, State Fish & Wildlife trust questions – Flowers will address later this meeting, legislative information – Flowers will distribute information this meeting. TU does have lobbyist during session.

Helm: Going to address tabled legislation? Corner crossing? Flowers – will address later.

Weaver: State wildlife action plan questions. Has changed job so is mostly representing herself at this point.

### **Dan Vermillion, FWP Commissioner. Explanation of Milk River Ranch Purchase**

He finds the most enjoyable part of being on FWP Commission is acquisitions. Process of purchase explained. 29,992 Acres of riparian habitat. Northern stretch of Milk River as it enters US from Canada.

2,241 acres appraised as riparian, rest as grassland. State Lands purchased 1,500 acres as well. Land was listed for 12.5 million, we purchased entire parcel for about 50% of listed price. Appraisal along with 19 comparative sales. Appraisal came back a bit higher than original appraisal. Many commissioners did visit the property prior to purchase. Nothing appeared inappropriate at that time. 10 miles native riparian access. Got access to 10,000 additional acres of public land. Milk River Conservation has also purchased many other conservation easements in the area. Good warm water fishery. Wildlife, antelope mule deer, elk, pheasant, and huns on property. More breaks/badlands type topography. Paleontological potential high. Great opportunity for college digs. Closest major town Havre. Feeds into Fresno Reservoir. Acquisition was considered to be eastern Montana, an area which does not have a lot of acquisition. FWP pays same taxes as previous landowner, so not a detriment to local government. Purchase prevents property turning agricultural, preserves it as it is. Gov. Schweitzer really wanted to get this done prior to the end of his term.

Criticisms – Paid too much, but price paid was based on recreational values along riparian corridor.

Helm: Couldn't Commission have gotten a few more appraisals to support price?

Flowers: It's never been an issue prior to this purchase, so it wasn't felt it was necessary. In this case, time crunch due to end of gubernatorial term. Felt delay might cause loss of opportunity to purchase.

FWP ranks projects, not ranked particularly highly. Didn't take into account whether other transactions are right and ready to proceed. Priority list does not bind Commission to order. Guidelines, not statute. Flowers: Used to be much more fluid, only in last 7-8 years that a more systematic process was adopted. More focused on wildlife/sportsman opportunities. Priorities recognized as recommendations, advisory to Commission who makes final decisions.

Mehring: Feels sportsmen in SW Montana were left out of the loop. Requested it be slowed down to no avail.

Flowers: It was on tentative agenda in May, don't know what else could have been done.

Vermillion: Always working on getting information to all interested parties. Did public notices in local papers, adjacent landowners, FWP web posting when EA published.

Mehring: Thought this was fast-tracked, pushed by Schweitzer.

Vermillion: Schweitzer never called him and applied pressure. Dan worked on this a lot to make sure he felt good about supporting this decision. Acquisition meant a great deal to FWP Commissioner for that area. Andrus: Where does money come from? 4.2 spent, how does that get replenished, what else went off the table because of it.

Flowers: Habitat Montana funds from sale of hunting/fishing licenses, approved by Legislature. Most of current appropriation spent on this purchase. Replenished by yearly license sales.

Vermillion: Criticism in Legislature about Habitat Montana, bill proposed to divert Habitat MT fund into block management.

Cestero: Public access is a requirement of spending that money.

Crismore: People thought it was another place to put buffalo.

Vermillion: This is not the case. New Director from Havre which may help rebuild those relationships in that area. Commission meeting is to be in Havre this spring to help rebuild some of those bridges.

Crismore: Unique area in that it is more sagebrush/breaks rather than all trees.

Vermillion: Tongue River railroad was not approved as it wasn't in best interest of sportsman.

Gibson: How is FWP land managed?

Flowers: Three categories all managed regionally – State Parks by Parks Division overseen by Regional Parks Manager, FAS managed by Fish & Wildlife Division, WMAs managed by Fish & Wildlife Division both overseen by regional supervisor.

Arnold: Majority not directly under Parks Division.

Flowers: Only areas designated as State Parks.

Walker: It's illegal to move property purchased with hunting/fishing dollars to Parks without Parks purchasing it. Parks does not have Access Montana funding source.

Vermillion: One of Schweitzer's legacies is purchase properties for public benefit.

Dailey: Was there a conservation easement at time of purchase?

Vermillion: Not on the table.

Mehring: What are wildlife values there?

Vermillion: Elk, antelope, whitetails, huns, ducks, geese, pheasant. 200-400 elk on ranch intermittently. Landowner tolerance for elk high in area.

Crismore: Lots of Indian artifacts there, eager to look into fishing, in the middle of nowhere, solitude. Lots of coyotes, fox, occasional wolf.

Weaver: Plan to rebuild relationships. Denied access last fall because of this purchase.

Vermillion: Re-engaging relationships. Lots of different things done over years have triggered those protests, without hunters there's not as much opportunity to manage wildlife numbers. Going to take time and conversations.

Burt: Not first time this has occurred, if communications remain open things tend to go back to the way they were previous.

Vermillion: Going to be a lot more effort to empower regional staff in next 4 years.

Flowers: Making changes to make sure those contacts are being made on a local level. Ongoing challenge. Field folks have large work load, juggling act. Renewed sense of urgency for this priority of building/maintaining relationships.

Hockett (Gallatin Wildlife): Strongly supports Habitat Montana. Thinks process is flawed. Legislative backlash to sportsman, concerned about current house bill. Access is critical, HB404 not as it is billed. It has a 2 year life.

Vermillion: Feels this is going to be seen in 2 years as taking money away from Block Management. Gives leverage to those opposed to MFWP owning properties.

Weaver: How is block management funded?

Flowers: Sportsman's license dollars, mostly out of state hunters. Thanks to Dan for coming and sharing this with us.

### **Travis Horton, Fisheries/recreation presentation.**

### **Pat Flowers – 2013 Legislative Update**

### **Howard Burt – Wolves and Trapping**

Harvested 225 total wolves, 128 hunting, 97 trapping statewide. R3 58 total hunting/trapping, 7 trapping. Harvest continued to escalate after trapping season began.

Gibson: Doing it for hides?

Burt: Mostly for taxidermy. Cites tag needed to take pelts across country boundaries.

Gibson: Experienced coyote hunters?

Burt: Don't know how many taking trapping classes actually trapped.

Idaho's season 166, harvest up. Wolf population estimate due next week. Goal is to harvest 25% of population.

Arnold: 653 population estimate prior to the season. What is the typical male/female ratio?

Burt: Really varies.

Arnold: average number pups?

Burt: Pretty sketchy as well. Wolf specialists fly monthly to get estimates.

Arnold: Was there an age limit to animals harvested?

Burt: It's tough to guess age by the time season arrives, but no restrictions in the regulations.

HB73 liberalized season to 3 wolves went into affect 2/13. Also reduced nonresident fee, allowed electronic calls, reduced waiting period to hunt, didn't prohibit hunt near park. Too late in the season to see a large impact from that.

Gibson: Any conflict with dogs caught in traps.

Burt: 50 statewide, 4 confirmed in wolf traps, only 1 dog killed plus foot injuries. Killed dog was in snare.

Cestero: Any other non-target species?

Burt: Not typically. Occasionally get deer, wolverine. Not typically wolverine or lynx. Big change for this season was no quota other than WMU 316 and WMU 110 near Yellowstone and Glacier Parks. If you take out trapping, we killed less wolves with hunting. Partly explained by wolves being intelligent animals that are learning. Livestock areas have wolves removed by Wildlife Services. Populations stabilizing in R3. NW parts of the state would like more harvest.

Gibson: What can you snare?

Sheppard: Furbearers, coyotes, bobcats. Legislature focused on wolf management. Commission has authority to adjust bag limit, not set permanently on 3. Going through public process for season proposals.

Mehring: 1 fatality of dogs pretty good.

Burt: Realistically big concern will be snaring.

Cestero: Continues to hear concerns about dogs caught in traps.

Burt: We continue to listen and figure ways to mitigate that. Wolf trapping classes stressed ethics.

Flowers: Internal conversations on issue, we will be addressing it in some form.

Burt: Half of dogs non-target catches were on private land, we can't regulate everything. Typically not hounds getting caught, more pets and bird dogs. Most bird hunting done prior to mid-December.

Public Comment:

None

CAC Caucus:

None

Next meeting June 6, 2013, in Bozeman. Agenda item: Question and Answer Session with FWP Director's Office.